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THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

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The student of Latin is far better situated, in matters of lexicography, than is his brother who devotes himself primarily to Greek. In the American Journal of Philology for March last (34.112-114) Professor Gildersleeve discussed, in Brief Mention, various plans put forth in recent years for a Greek Thesaurus.

The edition of Stephanus by Hase and the Dindorfs, still indispensable, is patchwork, and the advance in our knowledge of every phase of the life of antiquity, the advance in criticism and hermeneutics, in archaeology, in epigraphics, in grammar, in etymology, makes a Greek Thesaurus one of the most pressing needs of Greek scholarship.

A plan for a Greek Thesaurus, regarded by Professor Gildersleeve as feasible, has been prepared and is to be laid this year before the International Association of Academies. In this Thesaurus it is proposed to embrace the period from Homer to Aristotle; the whole mass of later Greek literature, in this plan, is to be reserved for a lexicon of its own. Professor Gildersleeve notes that the proposed Greek Thesaurus is to include 29 authors as against the 225 of the Latin Thesaurus.

Meanwhile, Passow's Wörterbuch der Griechischen Sprache (the basis of Liddell and Scott) is undergoing revision, under the direction of Dr. Wilhelm Crönert, Privatdozent in Strassburg. The revision is to appear in 50 parts, of 80 pages, or 160 columns, each; each part is to cost 3.20 Marks. Two parts have been issued, covering A to *Αλφειον*. The pages are a little smaller than those of the Epitome Thesauri Latini, noticed in THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 7.113. The publishers are Vanderhoeck and Ruprecht (Göttingen).

In the American Journal of Philology for June last (34.239-240, under Brief Mention), Professor Gildersleeve gave a brief preliminary notice of the book, which I am glad indeed to reproduce here:

In the programme that accompanies the new Passow . . . the editor, Wilhelm Crönert, holds out no hope of an early completion of the work. If the older Passow was sixteen years in building, how can we expect a much more speedy termination of a much more ambitious enterprise? But the aged scholar must not despair. Little did I dream that I should live to see the great Oxford Dictionary so near its goal as it is now. . . .

The scope of the new Passow is, as I have said, ambitious. It is to take in the whole Thesaurus of the Greek language down to the Byzantine time. The line is drawn at Procopius and the subsequent Byzantine historians, although the contemporary

poets and philosophers are included. Inscriptions and papyri are to be conscientiously exploited—even the papyri of the Byzantine time. Coins, gems, and vases are to furnish material. The new Latin Thesaurus is to yield its treasures, and the glosses likewise. Especial attention is to be paid to the dialects, the ancient lexicographers, scholiasts and grammarians, to the Septuagint and other versions and the New Testament. The texts are to be critically studied, and corruptions indicated. Etymology is to be handled briefly, exegesis concisely, the references are to be distinguished by their abundance, their exactness, their analytical arrangement. The first fascicle runs from A to *αιμορρυχιας*. An interesting and important feature is the category VERB (*reitung*), which is appended to some of the more considerable articles, and which may redeem in some measure the pellmell disorder of the examples—an offence to my soul as a syntactician. As in most German works, the art of abridgment is carried to an extreme, but those who have had some experience with the advertisements in German newspapers where 'e. fr. Pf.' represent 'ein frommes Pferd', will have no serious difficulty. C. K.

THE ABUSE OF FIRE¹

The title of this paper has no doubt suggested to you all sorts of possible topics. To allay your curiosity, I state at once that I am going to speak of priests, diviners, magicians and other cheats, who employed the element not only for cooking, lighting and keeping warm—what may be called the legitimate uses of fire—, but also at sacrifices, divinations and spiritistic meetings to produce phenomena that should dupe the credulous;—and this is certainly the abuse of fire.

The paper was really born of a much larger subject, the whole question of imposture, religious and secular, as practised among the Greeks and the Romans. Concerning this I have been collecting passages for years, not from any desire to equip myself for that particular pursuit, for which I can claim none of the natural talents that are so freely ascribed to certain scholars of our generation, but because I believe that no one can properly understand the manners and customs of the Greeks and Romans, their philosophy, religion, military achievements and even their business-relations, until he has taken account of the measure of their credulity, the impostors who played upon it and the means that they employed.

¹ This paper was read at the Seventh Annual Meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States, at Baltimore, May 3, 1913.

As you listen to my minimum of illustrative examples, two questions will no doubt be constantly in your mind: (1) How could so simple and transparent devices fool such a supernormally intelligent race as the Greeks, such a hard-headed, practical people as the Romans?; (2) How could persons be so woefully *inconsistent* in their beliefs as to refuse credit to this and accept that, to persecute one faith and welcome another that was equally fatuous? The first question you can solve satisfactorily by reading the advertisements in our daily newspapers. The second also finds a ready answer in modern experience. A felicitous phrase in Professor Gildersleeve's edition of Pindar has stuck in my memory for almost a quarter of a century: "the sweet inconsistency of women". But why not rather the exasperating inconsistency of both male and female from the time of Adam and Eve, or I had better say, Lilith, down to the third day of May, 1913? Don't we all know people who pretend to be Christians, and yet coquette with that epitome of folly, theosophy? Haven't we seen somebody, whom it is a painful operation to separate from a dime for the benefit of education or the church, pay a painted fortune-teller a whole dollar for her prophecy of a golden future that never comes? Proselyting *within* the Christian fold arouses bitter resentment; outside, it is an act of grace. When we read Juvenal's diatribe against the Egyptian religion, or Tertullian's against the Roman, or Celsus's against the Christian, we find them just as busy showing up each other's inconsistencies and superstitions as Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, in any religious discussion of today. The student of imposture only wishes that they had quarrelled still more loquaciously. The rascals who won their living from the fat wits of antiquity did not publish manuals of deception. We have to cull our facts from passages scattered through the literature of every age, often indeed from obscure writers that never sully the curriculum even of our graduate schools. Their Greek and Latin is not according to the rules of an Aristarchus or a Donatus. Nor should we have even this sporadic information, were it not for the fact that a trade-union can never exist among charlatans and tricksters; they have always been running rival shows and disclosing one another's secrets. For example, a pagan manufacturer of trick-apparatus has explained how a miraculous flow of water or wine may be caused from a vessel of special construction. For this we are very grateful; since his disclosures are the best possible introduction for a perusal of a certain saintly writer, who tells how by virtue of the presence of a bit of the true cross—a cross, by the way, which it would have taken all the wood in the cedars of Lebanon to construct of adequate size to serve so many sanctuaries with its fragments—the oil of a lamp

in a monastery at Poitiers is perennially overflowing. Again some coreligionist of his will partially reveal to us the rascally way in which the heretical gnostic makes a vessel of water suddenly become wine, or how the pagan magician plunges his hand unscathed into a pot of boiling pitch. But, unfortunately, tattlers do not always tell the truth, and consequently grave perils menace the modern investigator. He may do injustice to the dead repeatedly. In view of the unimpeachable evidence that all sorts of men and women have come back to this earth from the days of the Witch of Endor to those of Eusapia Paladino, what is to protect me from a visit of avenging Φάσματα and larvae, if I picture some astronomer as an astrologer, some chemist as an alchemist, some pious Christian as a crook—crook, I said, not Cook. In my sober judgment, the facile pens of such writers as Lucian, Hippolytus and Tacitus have damned to eternity not a few persons who were perhaps at the worst only self-deceivers. Take for instance, the merry tale that Lucian tells about Peregrinus, who, when he found that he had exhausted all methods of self-advertisement in the land of the living, sought one last joy in a sensational departure to the land of the dead. Before the thousands of Greeks that had assembled for the festival at Olympia, he mounted his funeral pyre and presented them with an auto da fe, the like of which had not been witnessed since the apotheosis of Heracles. No sham philosopher could be bared to view by a satirist in a more humiliating exposure than Peregrinus received from Lucian, but is it after all the real Peregrinus? Gellius, who knew him personally, presents him as a person of dignity and worth, and this is the view that Wieland adopted when he wrote his romance, Peregrinus Proteus, expressly to vindicate his character. Even sober scholarship in Germany has tried to prove the animus and untrustworthiness of Lucian, although there is a paucity of information from other writers.

From the annals of Roman history, also, we can easily choose a possible Peregrinus. For instance, can we be sure that Thrasyllus, the astrologer, was an out and out impostor? The judicial-minded historian, Tacitus², was evidently impressed by the story of the test that Tiberius made of his astrological knowledge. The future emperor was living in a sort of exile at Rhodes in a house that was perched aloft on rocks close by the sea, and reached by a steep and lonely path. His interviews with astrologers were held on the roof with no other person present but a trusty freedman, possessed of no education but of herculean strength. If Tiberius had suspected his visitor of any trickery, this giant, while serving as the visitor's escort on the return trip

² Ann. 6.20 ff.

down the cliff, would suddenly turn on him, and hurl him into the waves below. Now, when Thrasyllus climbed this precipitous path, did the sight of the mighty frame in front of him suggest some disquieting thoughts? Did he reflect on certain unexplained lacunae in the ranks of his profession, or had he perhaps on some occasion actually seen from afar some human form go somersaulting into the sea that tells no tales? We can only conjecture. We are told, however, that after he had made a profound impression on Tiberius by prophesying his elevation to the imperial throne, he was subjected to a severe proving of his art; for his crafty host asked him whether he had also fully ascertained his own horoscope and the character of that present year and day. Thrasyllus surveyed the positions and the distances between the various stars, then paused, became filled with terror, and the longer he gazed the more intense was his trepidation, due to amazement and fright, until at last he cried that he was threatened by a crucial danger of doubtful issue and well nigh fatal. At this Tiberius embraced him, congratulated him on his foreknowledge of peril and on his actual safety, and, accepting what he said as an oracle, kept him among his intimate friends. Now, the question is whether Thrasyllus was an impostor, who by shrewd intuition and a clever piece of acting won in a few minutes of awful peril not only safety but also fame and prosperity for a lifetime, or, by some coincidence, did the firmament actually signify according to all the rules of astrology what he said that it did. In all justice we should put a similar query to ourselves, before sentencing to the category of knaves all the gentlemen with whom we are now going to deal.

Fire is so dangerous and its manifestations so mysterious and exciting that religious and other thaumaturgists loved to use it in their trickery. They knew how to make their own bodies defy the ordinary action of the element, how to cause its appearance, as it seemed, spontaneously, and how to make it consume things that in ordinary experience passed for asbestic substances. Performances of the first sort are mentioned in various authors. We may begin with a story that Diodorus Siculus³ tells of the Servile War in Sicily. A slave named Eunus, who was born in Apamea, had made himself chief of the insurgents under the title of Antiochus, King of the Syrians, largely through his reputation as a magician and worker of wonders. Naturally, he saw and had intimate conversation with the gods, as a prophet is expected to do, and soon he had enough correct vaticinations to his credit to make his dupes forget such unfortunate guesses as could not be readily explained away. But the time arrived when some new sensation had to be forthcoming, and so by means of a certain device he contrived

to emit fire from his mouth, while counterfeiting divine inspiration, and would give his prophecy to this spectacular accompaniment. He effected this by using a nut, or something like it, with a hole bored at each end. Inside of this he put an inflammable substance, and set it on fire. By holding this receptacle in his mouth, and blowing through it, he produced at will either sparks or flame. As another historian, Florus⁴, tells the story, the substance he inserted in the nut was sulphur, and by gently breathing he could make the flame appear, while he was in the very act of speaking. 'Sulphur' seems like an unfortunate guess on the part of Florus, but, whatever calorific agent he may have used, we are assured that his fiery utterances gathered thousands to his standards, and the revolt of the slaves was one of the most formidable crises that any country ever faced.

The Orient was destined to produce hundreds of years later another fire-eater, or, to speak more accurately, spitfire, who inspired hardly less awe than this Eunus had done. The story really begins with a passage in Numbers⁵, where Balaam prophesies in these words: 'I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a star out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth'. In order that this prophecy might not go to waste, the Jew Barcochebas⁶ in the reign of Hadrian sought to fulfil it under the title of the Son of the Star, but unfortunately the 'corners of Moab' and the 'children of Sheth' were too much for him in the insurrection that he conducted against the Roman government. Among the god-given gifts ascribed to Barcochebas was the power to breathe out fire while exhorting his men to heroism. If this miracle had been attributed to the right sort of person, the Christian Jerome⁷ would no doubt have accepted it, since incredulity was not among his mental defects, but seeing that Barcochebas did not belong to the *true* faith, the saint explains that the Son of the Star had in his mouth not only his divine tongue, but also, what was much more to his purpose, some lighted straw. We are left to choose which it was that provided the pyrotechnics. Our decision becomes perhaps a little less difficult when we learn that after his defeat by the Romans, his own countrymen were so ungrateful to their human volcano as to interpret his true name, Bar Coziba, as meaning 'Son of a Lie'.

Another spectacular feat somewhat similar to that which we have been describing is that of putting fire in the mouth and extinguishing it with impunity.

³ 3.19.

⁴ 24.17.

⁵ Century Dictionary. Bār-kôke-bās in Aramaic = 'Son of a Star'. His real name was Bar Coziba-Coziba being the name of a town.

⁷ Apol. adv. Libros Rufini 559; cf. Eusebius 4.6.

³ 34.2.5.

The Greek trickster performed it with a lamp⁸. This seems like a miracle, indeed, until we recall that the ancient hand-lamp of earthenware was not so large that a cavern-mouthed man could not even swallow it, if its disappearance was desirable.

In still other ways the god Vulcan joined forces with Mercury, the patron deity of knaves, to beguile the simple of an unscientific age. Pliny, in his unnatural *Natural History*⁹, says that not far from Rome in the territory of the Falisci there were a few families called Hirpi, who, in an annual sacrifice which they performed to Apollo near Mount Soracte, would walk over a burnt heap of wood without being scorched. He adds that by reason of this they had been exempted by a decree of the Senate from military service and from all other public duties to the end of time. The exemption from all campaigning may strike us as not a little strange in the case of men who seem to have been especially created for marching painlessly over any sort of soil, but it is not the only remarkable statement in the same chapter; for Pliny¹⁰ goes on to describe men who might have stubbed eight toes instead of five on each foot, had it not been that a merciful Providence gave them feet that were pointed in the opposite direction from that in which they walked. But Pliny can cap even this yarn about those who went through life heel-first. A little further on¹¹, we learn of men whose feet were a cubit long. Fortunately, the family expenditure for shoe leather was brought down to a reasonable average, because the wives of these freaks had feet so small that they were called sparrow-footed. It is difficult to divine what gave rise to this story of the feet a cubit long; for it certainly outrages our tables of linear measurement, in which two feet do not make a yard. On the other hand, we may with much assurance identify those ladies of the tiny feet as Chinese. But Pliny¹² does not stop even here. How shall we identify those people of his who had feet as flexible as the body of a serpent, not to speak of his one-legged race whose supports were so expansive that on tropical days they used to lie on their backs, and, raising the foot, use it as a sunshade? Our trusty informant hardly needed to add that these monopods were phenomenal jumpers¹³. Now, it is because we find that story of the Hirpi in the company of such narratives as these that our first temptation is to reject it and many another statement that will be quoted from this same author, as being nothing but idiotic fiction. Actually, however, we have analogous tales to this not only from the modern traveller, but also in ancient literature¹⁴. Thus, as early as the

fifth century B.C. we have an instance. In the *Antigone* of Sophocles¹⁵ the guards are made to say: 'We were ready to take red hot metal in our hands, to pass through fire, to take oath by the gods that we had not done the deed, nor had any knowledge of the planning of the doing'.

Here I skip other instances¹⁶, and come to a late parallel for this Sophoclean ordeal, which I find in a work of fiction—that *Aethiopica*¹⁷ of Heliodorus which reminds us so strongly of the dime-novel of the Nick Carter variety and of certain literature of lubricity that is forbidden the United States mail. We are asked to picture to ourselves a fire-altar equipped with cross-bars of gold. Of course, there is no special potency in that material: it is simply that the word gold always sounded good to a Greek ear. When the bars had been heated red hot, if any perjurer or unchaste person stepped on them, they burnt him instantly, but an innocent suspect could tread them with impunity. I need not state that the fair feet of the heroine of the *Aethiopica* found them as harmless as a velvet carpet. If, however, this discriminating altar ever existed outside of the imagination of Heliodorus, there would seem to have been at least two *good* reasons why the novelist himself should have avoided any personal contact with it.

Now, one can hardly read any of these tales without thinking of that anaesthesia to pain which is characteristic of certain bodily states that greatly interest the psychologist and the medical man of today. Intense religious excitement has often been a factor in producing it. But a more satisfying explanation of these ancient cases lies nearer at hand; for the polymath Varro¹⁸ (a contemporary of Vergil) expressly states that it was not piety that made the soles of the Hirpi fire-proof but a special medicament, in which they soaked their feet in preparation for the walk. Similar devices are still used by masters of magic among savage peoples, in order to make the bottoms of the feet callous and insensible to pain. Classical writers¹⁹ name specifically such substances as alum, the white of egg, preparations of vitriol, etc., but, most interesting of all, a certain 'stone', *memphites* by name, found in Egypt near Memphis, which, when it is rubbed on a spot that is to be burned or cut by a physician, produces a harmless anaesthesia. It is cause for regret that our ancient authorities²⁰ on this anodyne are not such as to make us anticipate its appearance in the *materia medica* of the future.

But according to all appearances fire could be compelled to do more, as well as less than seemed

⁸ Theophrastus *De Igne* 57.

⁹ 7.2.11.

¹⁰ 7.2.14.

¹¹ 7.2.17.

¹² 7.2.18.

¹³ 7.2.16.

¹⁴ Theophrastus *De Igne* 57.

¹⁵ See Eckhard, *Magazin für Philologen*, 2.36-48 (Bremen 1797), on such fire rites as in Sophocles *Antig.* 264.

¹⁶ See Becker, *Charicles*, Engl. Ed., p. 183.

¹⁷ 10.8.

¹⁸ Servius on *Aen.* 11.787.

¹⁹ Theophrastus *De Igne* 58 ff.; Pliny *N. H.* 33.30.

²⁰ Dioscorides, 5.158; Isidore *Origines* 16.4.14.

natural to the ordinary spectator. For example the Greek wonder-worker, Cratisthenes, of whom Athenaeus²¹ speaks, used to bring it into being spontaneously, and we cannot doubt that what this public entertainer could do to amuse an audience was also in the repertoire of the crafty priest and the professional magician for their unholy purposes. This perhaps raises the general question *what* combustibles of special potency that are commonly reckoned the monopoly of modern times were really within the reach of the ancient impostor. In the first place, we must mention bitumen in all its various forms. The Biblical student recognizes the 'slime' of which we hear in the Old Testament as merely one of these, a sort of asphaltic mortar or partially evaporated petroleum. Nor need we be told what Pliny's water that could be used in place of oil actually was.

The extraordinary inflammability of naphtha was a matter of wonderment even to the much travelled Alexander the Great, as Plutarch²² shows in a story that incidentally illustrates the enviable freedom of the investigator and researcher in an age when the life of a man was not yet valued so inordinately above that of a sparrow, and societies with long names were so officiously blocking the progress of the Juggernauts of science. For he tells us how for the king's edification they first tested this fluid, by sprinkling it on a lane leading to his quarters, and then setting it on fire. But the lightning rapidity with which the flames spread led next to the application of the naphtha to a small boy named Stephanus, who didn't seem to anybody to be of any special value. By the time a sort of bucket brigade had put out the fire in this experiment, the value of the youngster had still further depreciated, but Alexander had had an unforgettable lesson in physics. Moreover, Plutarch himself feels indebted to the little Stephanus for what seems to him a reasonable theory that it was this same liquid that Medea used when she anointed the crown and mantle which she gave to Creon's daughter. This view, indeed, appears to have eventually won general acceptance; for I find in the *De Bello Gothico*²³ of the sixth century historian Procopius that it was known in his time as the *Μηδείας ἔλαιον*, or 'oil of Medea', and the soldiers mixed it with sulphur and asphalt to hurl upon the battering-rams of besiegers. That it was one of the ingredients of the mysterious compound called Greek fire (sulphur, saltpeter and naphtha), which played such an important part in the battles of Byzantine times, can hardly be doubted.

Now this story of Plutarch's about the world

conqueror and globe-trotter Alexander, together with other evidence that need not be retailed here, indicates that petroleum was not so well known even to the best informed Greeks and Romans that it would not be serviceable in various sorts of deception. It is, however, one thing to suggest the *probability* that it was so employed and quite another to ferret out clear *proof* of its use. Such proof is, however, forthcoming in more than one author. Thus Galen tells us how a miracle-worker would smear a wall or a stone with a mixture of brimstone and fluid asphalt, and then, extinguishing a lamp, immediately relight it by bringing the wick near this mixture. Of course, in those days, a vapor that could not be perceived by the naked eye was as good as non-existent for an ignorant layman.

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(To be Concluded.)

REVIEWS

Selected Essays of Seneca and the Satire on the Deification of Claudius. Edited by Allan P. Ball. New York: The Macmillan Co. (1908). Pp. 211. 60 cents.

Select Letters of Seneca. Edited by W. C. Summers. London: The Macmillan Co. (1910). \$1.10.

Vie de Sénèque. By René Waltz. Paris (1909).

Un Philosophe Ministre. By R. Pichon, in *Revue des deux Mondes* (September, 1910).

Seneca. Physical Science. By John Clark and Sir Archibald Geikie. London: The Macmillan Co. (1910). \$3.25.

The literature embraced in these volumes dealing with Seneca's prose writings is of a varied character. It reveals the versatile philosopher along many lines. We cannot resist the thought that within a comparatively short space of time scholars have begun to take him seriously, to give him the attention he deserves. Not to speak of rhetoric in all its persuasive branches, one finds in this supposedly superficial thinker an encyclopædic knowledge of government, philosophy, and natural science.

The selection of essays in Mr. Ball's book is consistent and chronological. He aims to give us a sort of bird's-eye view of Seneca's mind as it changed with the philosopher's environment (cf. the Introduction, 22). The Polybius reveals discontent; the essay on Clemency is in the spirit of the tutor who, with a calm face and a troubled heart, launches his pupil into the Roman vortex. And the Letters show the philosopher in his attitude of courageous resignation. Mr. Ball also includes the Apocolocyntosis, explaining its presence as due to a need for the presentation of the satiric side of the man's character. The book is clear and well put

²¹ 1.19 E. Cf. Eustathius on Od. 4.417-418 = vol. I, p. 175, lines 1 ff.

²² Vit. Alex. 35 = 685.

²³ 4.11.